

Exhibit No. 18Date 4-2-11Bill No. HB 316

Testimony on HB 613

Senate Finance and Claims Committee

April 2, 2011

Steve Gettel, Superintendent Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind

I apologize for not being available for today's hearing. As Superintendent of the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind I support Section 3 of HB 613. Below are comments that explain the reason for my support.

Vacancy Savings and Effects on MSDB Programs and Services

MSDB has 88.61 FTE – nearly all positions are .73 FTE and nearly all staff work between 185 and 200 day. This is the number of days our students receive services either in outreach or on campus.

MSDB cannot generate vacancy savings on positions that are .73 FTE; what public school could? Vacancy savings is bad budgeting policy for MSDB.

A 4% Vacancy Savings requirement equals \$227,851 in FY12 and \$227,958 in FY13. The total number of vacancies required to achieve this level of vacancy saving is more than 5.50 FTE or 7 ½ positions. To achieve this level of vacancy savings we must hold the following positions vacant in our current budget:

Education Program - Total FTE held vacant 1.59

- 1 full-time teacher
- 1 full-time outreach consultant

Student Services Program - Total FTE held vacant 3.9

- 2 full-time lead houseparents
- 1 full-time cottage life attendant
- 1 full-time nightwatch attendant
- 1 2/3-time food service worker

Impact on Education Program The combined effect of vacancy savings and current in personal services reductions contained in HB 2 for the Education Program will result in:

- 1 classroom teacher and 1 teacher assistant position vacant eliminating services for 4 multi-handicapped, deaf-blind students.¹
- 1 full-time outreach consultant providing services to the parents and teachers of 38 students.²
- the school not being able to accept additional students into the campus program that have instructional needs that are significantly different from the students currently enrolled.

¹Students attend MSDB because this placement is the Least Restrictive and most appropriate. A change in placement can only be made by the IEP team which includes the parents. If the parents or the local district do not concur with the change, under the rights of due process

"Stay Put" can be invoked which would require MSDB to continue providing services for the students.

²Any reductions in FTE in outreach staff will result in a redistribution of the caseloads to the remaining consultants. This will result in less consultation and technical assistance to the local school districts that serve sensory impaired students across the state. Only four districts employ trained teachers of the deaf and three districts employ trained teachers of the blind. Because of the generic training of special education teachers, districts that serve these students will have a difficult time meeting their needs. This in turn could increase the number of students referred to MSDB for placement.

Impact on Student Services Program With changes planed for the travel schedule next year and recent referrals the School anticipates an increase of 6 students in the cottage program next year.

The combined effect of vacancy savings and current in personal services reductions contained in HB 2 for the Student Services Program will result in:

- Continuing to hold 5 positions vacant, not allowing for the option to occupy one of two cottage wings currently not in use so that additional younger or older students can be staff in age appropriate groups.³
- An inability to accept additional students into the residential program if they are significantly younger than those currently enrolled or if they have additional health care needs that require nighttime nursing care.
- Inability to provide supervision for additional students who what to be involved in off-campus social and recreational activities such as 4-H, bowling, Heisey Youth Sports or even go on simple errands such as shopping, haircuts and movies.

³having a wing with such a wide variety of ages may cause parents to be reluctant about placing their child in the residential program.

Conclusion

Regardless of where deaf or blind children live or attend school any reduction in the staff at MSDB will result in less availability of the educational expertise needed by deaf and blind children to receive appropriate access to curriculum and instruction, development of communication and language, specialized support services, early intervention home-based programs, parent support and advocacy, consultation and technical assistance, support for social and emotional development, life skills, transition, and vocational training. All of these services are necessary for deaf and blind children to develop their communication, language, and vocational skills and self-help and independence to their fullest potential.